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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses some considerations about self theory and the Twenty Statements Test (TST) as they might be used to study women. Two theories have developed within the general rubric of "symbolic interaction" as coined by Blumer. The first is the Iowa School, or Kuhn school, which states that the self is a directly researchable phenomenon; the same procedures used in other sociological research are applicable and the self is researchable as any other social object. The TST was developed by Kuhn and his students, as a method of uncovering general self-attitudes. Conversely, the second school, or Chicago school, argues that the self is only knowable by inference and an understanding of the many roles which a person plays; thus, the self is not conceived as subject to analysis by sociological techniques. Supporting the Iowa school, this paper justifies its approach to self theory. Secondly, a brief description of self theory and the Twenty Statements Test is provided, so that both the theoretical orientation and its technique are understood. Thirdly, certain selected examples of self theory and TST research which have considered women are presented. The paper concludes with a short discussion of suggested future directions in which self theory might proceed, and presents an argument for investigating the self within a broader investigative framework than the TST provides. (Author/JR)

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SELF THEORY AND THE TWENTY STATEMENTS TEST: SOME THOUGHTS ON ITS APPLICATION TO WOMEN

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INTRODUCTION

A convenient benchmark in sociology for considering the importance of the self is usually a reference to James, Cooley, or Mead. Since their early writings, two somewhat divergent schools of thought have developed within the general rubric of what Blumer labeled "symbolic interaction" (Blumer, 1937). The first of these schools has been called the Iowa school (or Kuhn school). The major tenet of this school is that the self is a directly researchable phenomenon; the same procedures used in other sociological research are applicable and the self is researchable just as any other social object. The Chicago school (also called the California or Blumer school), on the other hand, argues that the self is only knowable by inference and an understanding of the many roles which a person plays; thus, the self is not conceived as subject to analysis by the various sociological techniques but, rather, by a more limited range of techniques. Although we will not engage in a point-by-point debate with advocates of either school, we are supportive of the Iowa school. As we will argue below, the Iowa approach of necessity subsumes the role theory and processual emphasis of the Chicago school.

In the present paper, we wish to address especially some considerations about self theory and the Twenty Statements Test (TST) as they might be used to study women. To this end, we will provide (1) a summary of the

Chicago school versus Iowa school debate so that our justification of self theory is made clear. (2) We will provide a brief description of self theory and the TST, so that both the theoretical orientation and its hopefully isomorphic technique are understood. (3) Certain selected examples of self theory and TST research which have considered women will be presented. (4) The paper will conclude with a short discussion of suggested future directions in which self theory might proceed, and we will present an argument for invertigating the self within a broader investigative framework than the TST above provides.

THE CHICAGO AND IOWA SCHOOLS

While it would be impossible in the present paper to embark on a complete discussion of the Chicago and Iowa schools, certain points raised by Meltzer and Petras (1970) must of necessity be addressed at the outset. In their interesting essay which outlines points of divergence and convergence between the two schools, Meltzer and Petras assert that the self is processual and therefore that the rather structural approach of the Iowa school may be inappropriate. The error in the Meltzer and Petras argument is that they ascribe a non-existent rigidity to Kuhn's conceptualization of the self. It is true that Kuhn has conceptualized the self in a manner which would make it a researchable phenomenon, however his notion of it as structural refers to it only at some given point in time; this is analogous to taking a snapshot of some moving object. We know that the object continues to move after the picture is taken but we temporarily "stop the action". In this way, self theorists try to make the self amenable to scientific analysis.

The strain between the Chicago and Iowa schools stems primarily from their interpretation of Mead. Further, the techniques they deem as suitable for research on symbolic behavior are contingent on their conceptualizations. This is what has led to the Chicago school subscribing only to sympathetic introspection techniques such as case histories, autobiographies, letters, and especially participant observation. (For an argument against being too dependent on a Verstechen approach, see Rudner, 1966.) The Iowa school, on the other hand, has conceptualized the self as a more directly researchable phenomenon, and in our opinion, has not done unjust violence to Mead's original thoughts on what the self is. As Mead stated, "The self, as that which can be an object to itself, is essentially a social structure, and it arises in social experience" (Mead, 1934:140).

The Chicago school's chief criticism of any approach other than their own is that it fails to detect the subtlety of symbolic interaction and particular "meanings" a person attaches to any given social act. For analyzing on-going behavior, the Chicago school is correct. However, for self theorists, this criticism is not entirely relevant, because their interest is the self per se rather that the analysis of social interaction (although self theory does make inferences about the social interaction a person has engaged in). In fact, Kuhn coined the phrase "self theory" in an attempt to clearly separate his interests from the more general interest of symbolic interaction.

CONCEPTS AND THE THEORY

As mentioned previously, much of the debate between the Chicago and Iowa schools is centered around conceptualization. While there are several concepts in need of clarity, before proceeding further, the most critical

of these is the concept of self. Rather than historically dealing with this a la James, Cooley, Newcomb, and others, we are referring only to Mead and interpretations of Mead and Kuhn.

We may recall that a key distinction made by Mead was that the self could be both a subject and object of oneself. The idea here being that we could have a self, that we could understand the meaning in referring to "ourselves" or more usually, "myself", because we could in out thought processes stand apart from ourselves to examine our own behavior or our anticipated behavior. In fact, this is precisely what we do in the processes of anticipatory socialization or role playing. We may act (or, not act) as others would expect us to and having done so, we may evaluate our behavior (or, not having behaved) to see if we have received the reaction we desired. The self, then, becomes a "repository of perceptions of self as object to oneself", and in this process, encompasses many attitudes.

> "Our selves are social objects just as are all the other objects that we experience. We come to experience and act toward ourselves, as toward all social objects, in terms of the classifications, norms, and definitions held by the groups of which we happen to be members... (The self) consists of the individual's attitudes toward his own mind and body, viewed as an object. We may think of it as consisting of all the answers the individual might make to the question 'Who am I?' (Hickman and Kuhn, 1956:43)."

If this makes the self appear to be too structured, we, so be it. It must be remembered however that the self as a social object is the only object common to all situations in which we participate. In this way, it comes to serve as the one stable thing from which we respond and interact with others. It may be conceptualized as being a set of attitudes because like an attitude, it does not change with great rapidity and as a rule does evince quite high stability through time.

It is difficult in a short paper such as this to sufficiently deal with all of the concepts which are critical for a symbolic interaction perspective. Since these have been discussed at some length by others (see for example, Hickman and Kuhn, 1956; Manis and Meltzer, 1967 or 1972; Stone and Farberman, 1970; Gordon and Gergen, 1968), and since it is assumed here that some understanding already exists about such concepts as meaning, gesture, definition of the situation, social reality, "others", etc., we will proceed to a discussion more germane to our task in this paper -- a discussion on self theory.

It may be helpful to sketch the a priori assumptions that the self theorists makes about human behavior. Tucker has already done this and we quote rather extensively from him on this point (Tucker, 1966:346):

> "Man lives in a universe of events and objects which do not have intrinsic meaning for human experience and behavior. Rather, the universe is endowed with meaning, by man himself, through social definitions in language.
>
> The meaning of any object is in terms of the behavior that is taken with regard to that object. 'Those concatenations of events which we think of as objects have become objects as a result of structuring by language.' So, the name for an object is simply a way of collapsing the meaning for the object.
>
> 'The individual is not a passive agent who automatically responds to the group-assigned meaning of objects. Rather, he is constantly engaged in telling himself what he must pay attention to, what he must look for, what the significance of some object is, and how he must act on the basis of objects about him.'
>
> The process indicated above is commonly called 'thinking'. Thinking, it is assumed, is made possible through man's ability to internally manipulate language symbols. The language symbols are acquired by the person through his interaction with others. Therefore, his thinking is limited by his language and further, by the 'others' who have interacted with him."

Kuhn's initial point of departure was, of course, previous writers

such as Cooley, Mead, H.S. Sullivan, and Newcomb, all of whom posited theoretical conceptualizations which gave importance to the self. Kuhn proceeded from them so that

> "...self theory can be stated thus. Human behavior is organized and directed; that which gives human behavior its organization and direction is the verbal internalization in the individual of the roles and statuses which he and those around him play; in fact, his view of himself as the common object among all of his acts, and, thus, in all his experiences becomes an attitude which, in its most general form, constitutes, as Newcomb has put it, the most general of all attitudes, and attitude toward attitudes (Kuhn, 1954:45)."

In the essay from which this has been quoted, Kuhn's first publication in which he discusses self theory, he already saw the problem as one of trying to discover what elements of roles and statuses have been internalized and how these could be used to predict behavior. Further, Kuhn saw that the self could be treated as a general attitude and therefore studied by many of the techniques which have already proven effective in the study of other attitudes.

In an article which appeared shortly after his initial statement, Kuhn reiterated his designation of the self as attitudes. His prime justification being "...this conceptualization is most consistent with Mead's view of the self as an object which is in most respects like all other objects, and with his further view that an object is a plan of action (an attitude) (Kuhn and McPortland, 1954:69)."

While the above give a fairly good idea of Kuhn's framework, we now present an additional statement which is somewhat more inclusive in its consideration of the theory's various properties. This secondary statement is one which Tucker has crystallized and serves as a good general statement on the theory.

> "A person obtains attitudes toward himself from his 'orientational others'. These attitudes are similar to those he has obtained regarding other social objects. But, the self as a social object, unlike other objects, is present in all situations. This being the case, self-attitudes are anchoring attitudes or the 'common frame of reference' upon which other attitudes are founded. Therefore, the self serves as the basis from which a person makes judgements and subsequent 'plans of action' toward the many other objects that appear in each specific situation (Tucker, 1966:347)."

THE TWENTY STATEMENTS TEST

For Kuhn and his students, the problem of uncovering general self-attitudes was solved (at least as well as could be expected at the time) with the development of the Twenty Statements Test. The development of such a test was predicated on the resolution of three problems associated with measurement of self-attitudes. (1) It is very difficult for the researcher to know what kinds of items to construct for inclusion. (2) There is always the danger of suggesting responses to the subject; and this is compounded by the danger of suggesting responses which are extraneous (exogenous) to the subjects plans of action. (3) There is the possibility that the self-attitudes elicited will have too high a degree of specificity and be applicable only to very limited situations. To the satisfaction of Kuhn and his students, the TST adequately dealt with these problems.

Since the research does deal with attitudes, it chief limitations are those limitations associated with all other research on attitudes (i.e., imprecise conceptualization, lack of rigor in measurement, etc.). However, while it is somewhat constrained through these limitations, it is at the same time strengthened by the applicability and utilization of the methods

and techniques available for analysis of any data collected; in particular, the use of content analysis and Guttman scaling.

The TST consists of a single piece of paper headed by the following instructions:

> There are twenty numbered blanks on the page below. Please write twenty answers to the simple question 'Who am I?' in the blanks. Just give twenty different answers to this question. Answer as if you were giving the answers to yourself, not to somebody else. Write the answers in the order that they occur to you. Don't worry about logic or 'importance'. Go along fairly fast, for time is limited.

Tucker has summarized the assumptions and assertions which the self-theorist makes in using the TST as follows (Tucker, 1966:352):

1. The person will refer the question 'Who am I?' to himself and not to anyone else.

2. The person is aware ('knows') of himself and he puts this 'knowledge' into words.

3. The person's awareness of himself is dependent upon the behaviors of others in a situation and not a matter of 'traits' or 'instincts'.

4. The person's awareness of himself precludes the use of any fixed responses; the responses must be the person's own plans of action.

5. The responses to the question are not limited to the testing situation, but have applicability in a variety of situations.

ANALYSIS OF THE TEST

As previously suggested, one of the primary benefits of the TST is that it is amenable to the same kinds of analyses as other attitude tests. The two techniques most often used with the TST have been content analysis and Guttman scalings.

By the use of content analysis, it is possible to dichotomize responses as either consensual references or as subconsensual references. Consensual

statements are those that require "...no further explanation in order to be understood by the analyst - or, for that matter, by anyone (Hickman and Kuhn, 1956:244)." Examples are "Iam a U.S. citizen." "I am a man." "I am 28 years old." The assumption is that there is consensus by everyone regarding an object(s) identified by these kinds of statements. The aggregate number of consensual statements for each respondent constitutes the respondent's locus score.

Subconsensual statements are those that refer to "...norms which may vary and into which the analyst must inquire if he is to grasp the denotation of the statement (Hickman and Kuhn, 1956:244)." That is, subconsensual statements require interpretation by the respondent so that more precision is achieved or so that the respondent may place himself relative to other people. Examples of subconsensual statements are "I am a moody person." "Iam a poor athlete." And so on. The subconsensual category is a residual one into which all non-consensual responses are placed.

The importance of this dichotomy for self theory is that the main focus in the procedures is on the meaning of social objects. Since the term 'meaning' has been defined in terms of behavior taken with regard to objects, it is reasoned that those persons who have the greatest number of consensual statements have acted in the greatest number of different situations. In other words, these people are more "socially anchored" and have "achieved stable identification by, and in terms of, the larger culture (Tucker, 1966:354)."

VALIDITY OF THE TEST

Kuhn states that

> "...there are generally recognized to be two related but distinct methods of assessing validity. One is by examining the logical relatedness of the test with the body of theory on which it rests. ...The other method is through correlation of the results of the test with other (already standardized) tests of the problem under investigation (Kuhn and McPartland, 1954:71)."

The latter method was not possible when the TST was developed since it was the only test of its kind in existence. It is to the former method then to which Kuhn turned for support.

Kuhn validated the test on two grounds: (1) the "chains of logic" used in designing the test; and (2) the results of the test correlated with the kinds of behavior which the orientation asserts are related. Both of these provide validity in the sense that their interpretation is that the test does measure what it purports to measure.

SELECTED STUDIES USING THE SELF THEORY CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND THE TWENTY STATEMENTS TEST

To present a complete review of all literature using the self theory conceptual framework and the TST would be far beyond the scope of this paper. The single best source on this is Spitzer, et al. (1971) and they provide nearly forty pages of in excess of 150 summarized studies. Our main concern is with highlighting those studies which have dealt with women, specifically, or which have implications deemed as applicable to women. This will admittedly restrict the leterature to which we can refer but will be more germane for present purposes, since at the close of this section we will argue for additional ways in which self theory and the TST could be used in the study of women.

Of the many studies conducted which have used the TST, those giving especial emphasis to women and the role of sex are rather few and far be-

tween. As early as 1954, Kuhn found that Amish girls looked forward to their roles as housewives more than did Gentile girls. Bugental and Gunning (1955) reported a study using the "Who are you?" technique in which sex variations were reported in the priority and frequency of types of categorical responses. Similarly, Kuhn (1960) reported finding that females more frequently and saliently identified themselves by sex and kin than did males. In a study of adjusted and unadjusted (undergoing marriage counseling) married couples, Buerklin (1960) found that adjusted wives were significantly more likely to indicate that they were married and mothers. While Couch (1962) found an inverse relationship between the degree of reported role specialization and the mention of sex for females, conversely, he found a positive relationship among these categories for males. In a biracial study utilizing both the TST and the Reference Group Test, Harris (1965) found that the TST elicited family self identities more often for females and whites than for Negroes.

Two other studies somewhat contradict the findings reported above. Mulford and Salisbury (1964) found that males mentioned sex more often than females but that females were more likely to identify themselves in terms of family status and roles. This latter finding is compatible with the findings reported above of Kuhn (1960) and Buerkle (1960). The most recent findings are those of Stratton and Spitzer (1966) who have reported that whatever sex differences exist are very minor. In fact, as Spitzer et al. report in their summary of this study, "except for one fixed response self-acceptance score, the equivalence of scores for male and female college students can be assumed (Spitzer, et al., 1971:103)".

In all of the studies reported thus far the main emphasis has been

primarily on observed sex differences. Another area which is relevant here is studies which more specifically examine the locating of oneself in a social system. Hollaway (1953), in an analysis using the WAY, found that one's frames of reference (or, groups of general others) were instrumental in determining what roles one identified as part of one's self. In a study on the effect of voluntary association on women, Tompkins (1955) found more active women exhibited greater social exchange in the social system via their greater role-playing and opportunity for friendship. In a somewhat similar study, Couch (1958) has reported that persons who identify with group memberships are less dependent on immediate others evaluations than are persons without such memberships; additionally, females were found to be more dependent than males on immediate others evaluations. Warbasse (1962) has reported that in an administration of the TST to women who were placed in perceptual or social isolation for eight hours that the women responding with a greater number of positions and statuses were more stable under prolonged periods of isolation; his explanation for this is that their greater number of positions and statuses indicate a greater integration in the social system.

Numerous studies have been reported which have demonstrated the differences in selves for religious and non-religious persons (Vernon and Steward, 1959; Vernon, 1962a and 1962b; Schmitt, 1964; Silverman, 1967). Equally as salient have been those studies which have found a self reference to race (Carraway, 1953; Harris, 1965a and 1965b; Wellman, 1969). The point of this line of discussion is that it is theoretically plausible to expect individuals to respond to the TST with a sex referent. In particular, even with the somewhat contradictory findings reported above, it

is reasonable to expect women -- in an era of "heightened consciousness"-- to perhaps be even more aware of themselves as women and the roles and characteristics which are to some degree dependent upon being a woman. For example, responding with such statuses as mother, wife, etc.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

In general, we may say that the TST does succeed in eliciting self-variation among different populations. Indeed it would seem surprising if this was not the case. Since little effort has been given to the formalization of self theory (or, for that matter, symbolic interaction), we are somewhat constrained in our desire to build on extant theory. At best, we can only say that one's perceived self will vary dependent upon many factors - sex being one of them. Additionally, we may make certain statements about the influence of one's reference groups and the meanings social objects are given as a result of social interaction. But we would be remiss if we stopped there.

The path we have chosen to follow is kindred to Merton's (1957) "middle range". Our plan is to move from considering the self, apart from its interactive formation, to a somewhat broader perspective. One of the main problems with self theory research has been inadequate treatment of the reference group influence on the self. Spitzer and Denzin (1966 and 1967) and Fitzgerald (1970) have suggested the need for a triangular approach in the study of the self; this is similar to the broader argument for "triangulation" in theoretically and methodologically considering any substantive research problem from divergent perspectives. (See Denzin, 1970) For self theory, this would mean considering at least three separable perspectives:

(1) How the individual sees himself.

(2) How the individual thinks others see him.

(3) How others actually see him.

What we would suggest, in addition to this approach, which is still essentially limited to self and significant others, is a fourth perspective: that of the generalized others.

To facilitate this, we suggest as useful an instrument used only once of which we are aware. This instrument is called "Who Are They?" and refers to some specified group. Goodman (1965) has used the WAT but as an indicator of significant others and reference sets rather than generalized others. We are suggesting that such an instrument be given in a manner similar to the TST but prefaced by comments whereby the WAT would be directly related to some group (in our case, women) within a given cultural context. Thus the persons taking the WAT would know about whom their comments referred. Our assumption is that this type of "test" would tap peoples' attitudes toward a definable group, and if we are proven correct, the WAT would obviously have utility far beyond any one group.

One additional point needs to be made. We are not ignorant of the many pitfalls to self theory and the use of the TST. Tucker (1966) and Spitzer, et al. (1971) have dwelled on these elsewhere and we would add little to their comments here. Yes, better conceptualization is needed and yes, one must be aware of the TST's weaknesses as well as its strengths. However, within the parameters of Merton's middle range, we can satisfy both our theoretical desire to better explain the evolution and continual alterations of the self and, at the same time, ground this theoretical bent in empirical data. We neither aspire to Parsonian abstraction nor to Lund-

bergian empiricism, rather we aim our sights more modestly on what constitutes, for us, a meaningful area for inquiry in which real people are of central importance.

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